

**MINUTES
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL STUDY SESSION MEETING
THE HAWK – BLACK BOX THEATER
AUGUST 12, 2024 – 5:30PM**

The special study session meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council was called to order by Mayor Rich at 5:31pm.

Council Members Present: Aldred, Boleware (arrived at 5:37pm), Bridges, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol (arrived at 5:46pm), and Rich

Council Members Absent: None

Others Present: City Manager Mekjian, Assistant City Manager Mondora, City Clerk Lindahl, Directors Aranowski, Brockway, Kettler-Schmult, Harvey, Schnackel, Skrobola and Sullen-Winn, and City Attorney Joppich

DISCUSSION ON THE ORCHARD LAKE ROAD AND 696 GATEWAYS

City Manager Mekjian introduced this discussion item:

- This project is included in the Capital Improvements Plan with a budget of \$1M.
- The project is scheduled to take place spring 2025, combining the project with the I-696 construction schedule, resulting in significant savings relative to landscape costs and traffic control.
- The design of the gateway feature should be timeless, transcending any branding updates for years to come.

Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation *Farmington Hills Gateways Orchard Lake Road & I-696*, Landscape Consultant Tracey Tobar, Senior Landscape Architect with OHM Advisors, presented design concepts focusing on:

- Creating matching gateway elements on both the north and south sides of the Orchard Lake Road/696 Gateway entrance, including a decorative wall integrated with the landscape.
- Renderings showed the gateway element, with the text “Farmington Hills” with its iconic hills (arches), with the letters and logo arches internally illuminated with LED lights, potentially changeable to reflect change in seasons and/or emphasizing community focus on various topics and themes.
- Backdrop of ornamental and evergreen trees, with low landscaping in front of the decorative walls and gateway elements.
- Various font options were shown; the font design should ensure visibility and durability of design.

Landscape Consultant Tobar reviewed the project schedule and constraints:

- Construction Drawings for the project are currently underway.
- Project is included in the FY24/25 City Capital Improvement Budget
- Planned for bidding in fall of 2024, with installation taking place in winter 2024 and/or spring 2025 (MDOT planning to finalize the landscape restoration of the road project by spring of 2025)
- Timing the project in this window allows for “piggybacking” onto the current I-696 construction project, reducing site preparation costs, utilizing MDOT traffic control, and utilizing some of the landscaping already planned through MDOT – MDOT will be planting 132 trees.

- Timing of project does not allow for completion of City's branding and potential logo refresh.
- Landscape Consultant Tobar suggested selecting an updated font with modern elements. Five fonts were presented; several council members liked the 5th font best.
- Next Steps: Gain consensus for moving forward with concept and spring construction

Council discussion included:

- It was important to focus on the basic elements of the project such as walls and landscaping before finalizing the lettering, particularly because there may be a logo refresh.
- Concerns were raised about the risk of combining old elements, like the arches, with new fonts, especially when the final updated logo design is undecided.
- Additional fonts should be explored. The font should not be tied to the logo, as again, the logo may go through multiple changes over the lifetime of this gateway feature. Council expressed a desire for a clean, simple, classic, font design that will not quickly become outdated and that will reflect the City's forward-looking nature.
- Several Council Members expressed difficulty in visualizing the proposed changes based on the provided renderings. They called for better, more detailed visuals, including aerial shots and street views at different angles, to provide a clearer understanding of how the project would look once completed. These visuals were seen as crucial for making informed decisions about the project's design and its impact on the city's viewscape.
- On the other hand, one council member liked the proposal as is.
- It was also important to coordinate the project with ongoing infrastructure work by the Oakland County Road Commission. The integration of these efforts, particularly with the median repair expected next year, was essential for the overall success of the project. Both projects should complement each other and enhance the area's aesthetics.
- The importance of readability, particularly for signage visible from high-speed roads, was stressed, with the recommendation to use simple, clean lines in the font design.

Regarding the city logo

Discussion shifted focus, moving to the work being done on a potential redesign of the City's logo.

- There was general consensus on the importance of having a memorable architectural symbol for the City, similar to the iconic features of other cities like Sterling Heights and West Bloomfield.
- Concerns were raised regarding the existing logo being completely redesigned only a few years after it had been used in numerous costly gateway signage installations.
- The idea of making minor tweaks to the current logo, such as updating the font or color, was favored by some as a cost-effective solution.

Summary

In summary, regarding the signage elements of the gateway design, consensus appeared to reflect a strong desire for a modern, timeless design that aligns with the city's identity and practical concerns, while also ensuring cost-effectiveness and clear communication through well-thought-out visual elements.

Regarding the logo generally, whatever was decided regarding the logo would be the City's face for the next 20+ years, and this should not necessarily be tied to past investments. Investing in new, more effective logo and signage that accurately reflects the city's future should be considered. On the other

hand, new technologies could allow for modifications to existing signs without incurring the full cost of replacement.

DISCUSSION ON THE AWARD OF PAYMENT FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION CONSULTING TO LIFE'S JOURNEY

Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Employee Development Harvey reviewed the information that had been provided to Council in July, and which was outlined in her memorandum to the City Manager dated July 29, 2024.

The Life's Journey proposal, initially submitted in July 2021, outlined services including surveys, focus groups, data collection, consulting, and employee training, totaling \$264,400. The City had previously approved \$65,000 per year for three years, and to date \$196,000 has been spent on these services.

The DEI Director was hired in February 2023.

Discussion centered around the remaining \$109,000 owed for Phase III work already completed (Respect in the Workplace), plus an additional \$40,000 for a procedural justice webinar that the City could use for ongoing public safety training, and \$50,400 for the continuing implementation of the DEI Strategic Plan relative to "Impacts of DEI Training" that is outlined in the original proposal. This will complete the City's work with Life's Journey.

The after-the-fact request is for approximately \$200,000 to complete the training outlined in Phase III of the proposal.

Obligation to pay

- Phases I and II have been completed.
- The contract is up August 27, 2024. The two components represented by the \$50,000 and \$40,000 amounts have not been executed.
- City Attorney Joppich advised that the request for \$109,000 is for work that has already been completed within the contract period. For the remaining two amounts, the work is unlikely to be completed by August 27, and unless Council wants to extend the contract and authorize the work to proceed, the two remaining amounts could potentially be considered outside the contract.
- The original \$65,000 a year was for a "cafeteria approach" in which the City had the \$65,000 per annum to spend at its discretion. Nothing else had come to Council for approval.
- There was discomfort among Council Members regarding paying for work not yet completed, especially if there was no contractual reason to do so. There was also discomfort that the \$109,000 for "Respect in the Workplace" had not come before Council for approval before the work was done.
- After further discussion, City Attorney Joppich suggested that he provide a confidential legal memorandum regarding the complexities of this obligation.

Role of DEI Director going forward

- The original idea had always been to complete Phase III in house. Due to the newness of the DEI organization and the complexity of transitioning responsibilities from the consultant to the in-house DEI Director, this had not happened.
- Going forward, the DEI Director should assume responsibility for the items in Phase III.

- Council requested more information on the deliverables and outcomes of the DEI work.

The importance of DEI training

- Council members expressed support for DEI training generally and noted the importance of this work. Those members who had been on Council at the time this effort started spoke to the situation in the City at the time. The concern was not regarding the need for or support for DEI training. Rather there was significant concern regarding the reporting of training outcomes, and processes by which Phase III steps had been approved without Council authorization.
- The DEI training accomplished so far had improved the Farmington Hills organization.

Summary

- Having processes in place to monitor contracts is important.
- It is important to track the sentiment of employees via confidential surveys regarding the impact of DEI training.
- City Attorney Joppich will provide a confidential memo prior to this item coming back to Council for formal approval at their next meeting.
- City Council will be asked to approve payment for work that has been completed.
- City administration was asked to provide qualitative and quantitative information regarding the positive impact of DEI training; it was important to communicate this to the Farmington Hills community.
- The DEI Director should take over the Phase III implementation steps of the DEI effort.

DISCUSSION ON THE HAWK INNOVATION CENTER AND STRUCTURE OF MANAGEMENT

Referencing her August 12, 2024 memorandum, Economic Development Director Brockway explained that she was seeking direction regarding the third floor incubator space and the second floor kitchen at the Hawk.

- City staff will administer the Hawk Innovation Center and potentially the commercial kitchen space on the 2nd floor.
- The discussions prior to 2019 looked at the third floor 14,000 square foot lab space as an incubation space for wet-lab med tech type uses.
- In 2023 the City received a \$750,000 grant from the State of Michigan to develop the incubator space. Subsequently the space had its first participant under a use participation agreement – Comprehensive Gi, who is still in the space.
- Director Brockway is recommending that the City adjust the use space of the incubator for a variety of entrepreneurial uses and no longer have a sole focus on wet-lab operations.
- The City was also considering building up the commercial kitchen space on the second floor, for use as an incubator for food-related businesses, such as bakers or caterers, who need a professional space to operate. The kitchen could also be used for city purposes.
- The City is considering repurposing the old library space on the third floor as a conference center, for use by incubator participants and community organizations.
- The City will administer these programs. City administrators will include Director Brockway and Special Services staff. This will be done initially for a period of 3 years, to the end of 2027, after which they will evaluate how things are going.
- Per the MEDC (Michigan Economic Development Corporation), the grant from the State can be used for an incubator commercial kitchen.
- The deadline for grant use has been extended to 2027.

Discussion included:

- Some years ago the City looked at updating the 2nd floor kitchen, only to discover the cost was going to be \$3M-\$4M. The minutes of those discussions should be provided to Council.
- The kitchen at the Costick Center would continue. Almost 100 meals per day were prepared there, for delivery by Meals on Wheels.

Council members emphasized the importance of not investing heavily in a project without ensuring that it meets the community's needs and fits within the broader redevelopment plans. There was concern about the financial viability of renovating the kitchen, especially if the state grant does not cover the full cost and the City must complete the renovation out of City funds.

The Costick Center kitchen also needs to be rebuilt. Conversation focused on options that were available regarding the Costick Center.

Invoice from Couzens Lansky

The City had received a \$5,090 bill from Couzens Lansky for work authorized by the Economic Development Corporation regarding establishing the Hawk Hatchery as a 501(c)3. The purpose of this action originally was so that the Hawk Hatchery could operate the incubator space. The City will have the documentation of this action by next Monday.

City Attorney Joppich pointed out that the 501(c)3 status would open other doors for the City and Hawk Hatchery; the non-profit status would be available for a variety of projects and functions.

It came out in discussion that the \$5,000 expenditure had not received prior authorization, although there had been past conversations that might have led the EDC to think the expenditure was authorized. Council was again facing an issue of expenses covered without Council authorization, with an after-the-fact request made for payment.

City Attorney Joppich pointed out that in all the discussions about the Hawk Hatchery, including discussions of a possible non-profit status, to his recollection and also as reflected in the minutes, no conversation had ever taken place as to who would pay the legal fees to set up the nonprofit organization.

Mayor Rich was concerned that there was no engagement letter with the Hawk Hatchery, the City had received no deliverables, and it was unknown who is on the board of the organization that had been created by the 501(c)3 process.

As the hour was late and the regular City Council meeting was being held in a few minutes, Mayor Rich closed discussion and opened the floor to public comments.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Pam Gerald, Farmington Hills, offered comments regarding the DEI discussion held tonight. It was important to see data regarding the DEI efforts being made.

ADJOURNMENT

The special study session meeting adjourned at 7:23pm.

APPROVED 9/9/2024

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk